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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Letter dated 24 August 1994 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information on the status of the Bulgarian minority in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 103 (b) of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Dragomir DJOKIĆ
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

* A/49/150.

ANNEX

Status of the Bulgarian minority in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

In the latest census (1991), 26,922 inhabitants of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (0.2 per cent of the total population), declared themselves to be Bulgarians. In terms of their number, they constitute the tenth minority group in the country. Persons belonging to the Bulgarian minority live in central Serbia, and are most numerous in the municipality of Bosilegrad (72.9 per cent of the inhabitants of this municipality), Dimitrovgrad (52.5 per cent) and Surdulica (6.2 per cent).

Persons belonging to national minorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including the Bulgarian minority, enjoy, on the basis of equality with other citizens, all human rights guaranteed in international instruments on human rights as well as additional minority rights. Those rights go beyond the provisions of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The rights granted to the national minorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia by far exceed those granted in the majority of countries in the world, particularly those to which the Serbian and Montenegrin minorities are entitled in the countries that recognize their existence.

Under the Constitution, the federal State and its constituent republics (Serbia and Montenegro) are defined as States based on equality of all their citizens, the State not being defined as the State of the largest nation. Consequently, all citizens, whether they belong to the Serbian or Montenegrin nation or any of the national minorities or ethnic groups, enjoy equal human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

In addition, the members of national minorities are guaranteed, individually or collectively, some special rights such as the use of their own language and alphabet; the right to education and public information in their own language; the right to establish educational and cultural organizations or associations; the right to establish and maintain unhindered relations, in the country and abroad, with members of their nation living in other States, etc. Under the Constitution, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia recognizes and guarantees the right of national minorities to preserve, promote and express their ethnic, linguistic and other characteristics as well as the use of national symbols in accordance with international law.

Under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in areas of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia where national minorities live, their languages and alphabets shall be in official use.

In Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad, municipalities with predominantly Bulgarian population, the highest legal acts of the municipalities, their statutes, stipulate that, in addition to the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet, the Bulgarian language and alphabet are simultaneously in official use. All municipal bodies and other organizations exercising public authority use the

Bulgarian language on an equal footing with the Serbian language. Geographical names, the names of streets, enterprises and other public signs are written in both languages. The Bulgarian language is used in both written and oral communication between organs and organizations as well as with individuals, in proceedings conducted to give effect to and protect the rights, duties and responsibilities of the citizens in the maintenance of records, the issuance of official documents, etc.

Every citizen of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, whether a member of a minority or a majority group, is equally entitled to share in the distribution of power at all levels under equal conditions.

In the municipality of Dimitrovgrad, where 52.5 per cent of the population are Bulgarians, 22.5 per cent Serbs, 22.4 per cent Yugoslavs and 2.6 per cent others, members of the Bulgarian national minority are represented with 97 per cent in the municipal assembly. The president of the municipality, the secretary and the president of the executive board are members of the Bulgarian national minority. Of the total number of judges of the municipal court, 75 per cent are Bulgarians, as is the president of the court. Of all employed in the Department of the Interior, including its head, 66 per cent are Bulgarians, and 89 per cent of directors of enterprises are Bulgarians. In the municipality of Bosilegrad, all the delegates to the municipal assembly are members of the Bulgarian minority.

The education in the languages of minorities is carried out at all levels, from pre-school to the highest educational level. In elementary and secondary schools the curricula and programmes for pupils belonging to national minorities are conducted in their mother tongues if a minimum of 15 pupils enrol in the first grade, and also for a smaller number of pupils with the approval of the Minister of Education. Thirdly, it is also possible to have bilingual instruction or additional mother-tongue classes with the elements of national culture.

In the Dimitrovgrad elementary and high schools, all three options mentioned above are available as provided for by law at the discretion of pupils and their parents. The total number of pupils in the elementary school is 1,056 whereas 93 per cent of the school staff, including the principal, are members of the Bulgarian national minority. The principal and 90 per cent of the staff in the grammar school, with 260 pupils, are Bulgarians. The high school in Dimitrovgrad is one of the most modern secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia, which provided the funds for its equipment (except for 10 per cent of local voluntary contributions). Two hundred students of Bulgarian nationality are attending universities in Serbia.

The right of members of national minorities to be informed in their own language is guaranteed by the Constitution and laws. To that end, financial resources are also allocated from the state budget.

The Bratstvo press and publishing house issues a weekly, a children's paper and a literary magazine in the Bulgarian language. Funds are ensured from the budget of the Republic of Serbia on a regular basis for the running costs and employees' salaries. The Television and Radio of Serbia broadcasts a 15-minute

daily programme in Bulgarian via the Radio NIS station. The programmes last 30 minutes on Sundays. Furthermore, the Belgrade television broadcasts a 15-minute weekly newsreel. The assembly of the municipality of Dimitrovgrad has recently been granted a frequency by the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

The cultural activities of the members of the Bulgarian national minority are of a long-standing tradition and play a special role in the preservation and fostering of national identity. The cultural centres in Dimitrovgrad and Bosilegrad are home to art and cultural events. There are two culture and art societies of the Bulgarian national minority as well as the Hristo Botev amateur theatre, which performs in Bulgarian. The municipal library of Dimitrovgrad has a stock of about 30,000 titles in the Bulgarian language and the municipal library in Bosilegrad has about 14,000 titles. International cooperation is traditionally taking place through the exchange of cultural programmes and guest performances with the cultural institutions from the Republic of Bulgaria.

The declining economic power in the country, primarily due to the United Nations Security Council sanctions, has eroded the State's capacity to assist the institutions and organizations of the national minorities and generally adversely affected basic conditions for the exercise of human rights. However, the Democratic Association of Bulgarians, a registered political organization, albeit one with a small membership and little political influence, has taken advantage of this situation to represent it as a deliberate neglect of minority rights by the State (for example, in the wake of the sanctions, the overall situation concerning the financing of newspapers, including the newspapers of national minorities, is precarious. Nevertheless, the State is doing its utmost to maintain them even in these difficult circumstances).

It must be stated that the legislature in the Republic of Bulgaria does not even recognize the existence in that country of national minorities, but only of ethnic groups, regardless of numerical or other particularities of such "groups".